



Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission

Military Coup in Sudan: Implications for Human Rights

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Good afternoon and welcome to today's Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission hearing on the human rights implications of last October's military coup d'état in Sudan.

Today marks the Commission's seventh hearing on the human rights situation in Sudan since its founding in 2008.

I cannot emphasize enough how deeply sorry I am that we have to be here examining today's topic.

Like so many of my colleagues, I have worked for human rights, humanitarian aid, and the rights of the Sudanese people to determine their own future for over 16 years.

I even led congressional protests and was arrested three different times in support of human rights and humanitarian

workers in Sudan – the first time, in April 2006, with my good friend and our beloved former colleague, Tom Lantos.

So, I am one of many in the U.S. Congress who welcomed the 2019 Constitutional Declaration and the later Juba Agreement.

I celebrated the hard-fought, well-earned democratic opening that followed.

In a world filled with tragedy and back-sliding, Sudan – finally – was a good news story.

When the regime of President Bashir collapsed from the pressure by Sudan’s civil society, I expressed concerns over the military’s inclusion in the transitional government. But over the past two years, Sudan was moving and establishing a democratic government, rule of law, and respect for human rights.

Progress was often difficult, but the future seemed to hold great potential.

And then came the coup on October 25.

As we will hear today, the military’s action was not entirely a surprise. There were signs of tension in the civilian-military power-sharing arrangement before the coup, including a pro-military sit-in in which protesters demanded the overthrow of “failed” civilian leaders.

But from where I sit, it's not clear that we expected the situation to come to a head in the way it did. I will be interested to hear what our witnesses have to say about signs we either missed or didn't take seriously enough.

It has been heartening to see the immediate, almost universal condemnation and rejection of the coup. Just yesterday, tens of thousands of Sudanese again took to the streets to demand a genuine civilian-led government.

But standing up against the coup is coming at a significant cost. According to the Sudan Doctors' Committee, at least 43 protesters have been killed so far.

Although some detained officials were released after Prime Minister Hamdok was reinstated, many people are still imprisoned. Journalists and health workers are among those who have been targeted.

The political situation in Sudan remains very fluid. We don't know how this will all turn out.

What is very important, though, is to know how we in the U.S. Congress can be helpful.

How can we best support pro-democracy activists?

What measures would be constructive and empowering for the people who are putting their lives at risk for genuine civilian-led government?

Are we doing enough to pressure the leaders of authoritarian states that may have encouraged the coup? And that even now continue to provide financial and political support to those who led, carried out, and benefit from the coup?

Are we coordinating closely enough with our true democratic allies?

And how can we protect the progress that was being made towards accountability for past atrocities in Sudan?

I hope these questions will guide our conversation this afternoon.

Thank you and I turn now to Co-Chair Smith for his opening remarks.